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ABSTRACT

Children who are not encouraged to read at home are less likely to be successful in reading later. Parents who were unsuccessful in school or who were not read to themselves are less likely to read to their own children and may need direction in how and what to read. Parents can be taught how to talk through a story with their children through modeling done in a workshop. In communities where parents tell oral stories, they should be encouraged to continue the storytelling tradition, and then to expand it to include picture books. Teachers and other parents can share lists of books that they have enjoyed reading to children. Read Aloud West Virginia is a successful program that has trained over 800 parents and other adult volunteers. A 1-hour workshop familiarizes volunteers with program goals, read aloud methods, and children's books. Volunteers then agree to read in the school of their choice 1 day a week. Coordinators in each school are responsible for the volunteers and the program. One special program feature is author week, during which there are daily activities related to the author's books in every grade. Lists 101 favorite read-alouds, in categories for young children, kindergarten and up, and older children. (Contains 13 references.) (SV)

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A READ ALOUD PROGRAM THAT ENCOURAGES PARENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLS

Considerable research and anecdotal evidence suggests that one of our major responsibilities as educators must be to educate parents as well as children (Freeman, 1991; Heath, 1982; Teale, 1981; Teale & Martinez, 1988). Little can be done to end the cycle of illiteracy without beginning with the communities in which our children live. Communities have great potential to influence the actions and interests of their residents. Parents want their children to succeed in school and probably welcome most help that schools or other agencies offer them.

Parent involvement in reading programs is particularly important in rural areas because families are the primary source of education since access to additional educational resources is limited. Children who are not encouraged to engage in reading in the home probably will be less likely to be successful in reading later (Trelease, 1989a). The problem many parents face is not a lack of desire in this endeavor, but in knowing what to do to enable their children to achieve reading success. Programs like Read Aloud West Virginia are showing great success by making parents partners in learning and advocates for family literacy.

Parent Experience

A Department of Defense study conducted in the 1980's determined that the most important factor in determining educational success among 16 to 23 year olds was the educational level of their mothers (Reed & Sautter 1990). Parents who did not learn to read, who have limited English skills, or who did not experience success in school are less likely to be involved in their children's formal education. For these parents schools are a reminder of their own failure and many feel intimidated when facing their children's teachers.

Parents who do not read to their children do not remember being read to themselves (Johns & Harvey, 1991). Heath (1982) looked at the differences in how parents interact and read to their children in three very different communities. She found that the children from the low SES community had a difficult time taking meaning from books because they had not experienced having stories read to them. However, it was interesting to note that there was a great deal of creativity in language during parent-child interactions

because the majority of their story telling had been oral. These children told stories that were rich and original because this was the main way for them to get their parent's attention.

Parents seem to understand that they should spend time reading to their young children because of all they see on television and read about it in popular magazines and books (Manning, Manning, & Cody, 1988). However, many parents need more direction in how and what to read. Many researchers feel that book reading interactions between parents and children are different depending on the socioeconomic status of the community (Heath, 1982; Morrow, 1988; Teale, 1981). In a study conducted by Handel and Goldsmith (1988) parents reported that they rarely engaged their children in making inferences while reading, nor did they discuss their own reactions to the story. Children who are read to on a regular basis will independently "reread" familiar books to themselves or others before they learn to read (Teale & Martinez, 1988). This helps to ready them for formal reading instruction. In another 1988 study Martinez and Teale found that there are three types of library books: very familiar, those read over and over in school, familiar, those read once, and unfamiliar, those unread. They found that kindergarteners would choose the very familiar books three times as often and familiar books twice as often as the unfamiliar books.

Getting Parents Started

Parents can be taught how to talk through a story with their children through modeling done in a workshop. The story reader can show them that the discussion should not be limited to what is on the page. Using questions that encourage prediction, providing details, and summarizing should be encouraged in a workshop setting. Programs that work do so because they take advantage of and use the parent's strengths. In communities where parents tell oral stories they should be encouraged to continue the tradition of story telling and then to expand their story telling to include picture books. Picture books can also be an invaluable resource in areas where parents have limited reading skills. Parents can share books with their children and continue telling stories the way they were told during their childhood.

Parents with limited English skills and recent immigrants can be brought into the schools community by demonstrating to them that they have important skills that are needed. Schools that do not have the funds for ESL teachers or books written in a child's native language can start their own foreign language library. Children, with the help of their parents, can write and illustrate a story about their native country or a favorite tale that they were told with their child. Copied can be translated into English by another student or adult who speaks the same language. These stories can then be kept in the library and borrowed by other students and new members of the school who speak that language. This allows all parents to become partners in learning.

Children's literature can have a profound effect on people of all ages. Through literature we learn about our own culture, as well as the culture of others. The written word has the ability to influence our perceptions of people. We learn about history, relationships and emotions through literature. Literature provides educators with a tool to help students develop positive attitudes toward people and cultures which are both similar to and different from their own. It is important for children to experience both in the book that they read. The books marked with an asterisk at the end of this article are ones which may help students learn more about people from various of regions of the world and many different cultures.

Parents also need to know what to read to their children. Teachers and other parents should share lists of books that they enjoyed reading to their children. These lists should clearly differentiate between books that should be read to the child and books that the child can read alone (Trelease, 1989a). Children's listening comprehension is much higher than their reading comprehension. Therefore, books read by the parent which are above the child's reading level can and should be enjoyed together. These books may spark an interest in other books that can be enjoyed alone on the child's reading level.

Another issue which should be addressed when introducing reading aloud to parents is questioning technique. Many children who come from low income homes have less experience with open-ended questions such as, "how, why, and when" (Blank, 1975 cited in Morisset, 1991). Children who have not been exposed to this type of questioning may ultimately have a harder time adjusting to school where open-ended questioning is used.

Read Aloud West Virginia

One program which has successfully presented parents with answers to questions about what to read, how to read, and to instill love of reading is Read Aloud West Virginia. This program trains parent/adult volunteers to read to children on a regular basis. To date over 800 adults have been trained including parents, community leaders, and athletes. This program demonstrates to parents and volunteers a simple, inexpensive way to become involved in children's education and it demonstrates to the children a love of reading. Volunteers initially attend a one hour workshop to familiarize them with the goals of Read Aloud West Virginia, read aloud methods, and children's books. They are also shown a film about read aloud by Jim Trelease, author of The Read Aloud Handbook. The volunteers then agree to read in a school of their choice one day a week. The whole school and community have the opportunity to get involved in this program. By exposing children to a variety of stories it is hoped that the children will be encouraged to spend more time in free reading activities themselves. Ultimately, the program benefits the parents, the children, and the school by encouraging a love for reading both in school and at home.

Laura Walker, the Monongalia County Read Aloud chairman and member of the State advisory Board believes that the county's program is so successful because the training goes where the need is. "It doesn't matter if there are 10 or 30 parents interested in the program. When a group is interested in a training session we do it". This attitude has seen the program expand from one school in the county to over twenty.

There are coordinators in each area school who are responsible for the volunteers and the program. Many of the books presented provide children with a way to explore experiences, feelings and ideas they already have, as well as new ones. Choosing books with characters which the young reader can relate to helps them to safely explore their own world and build on their experiences. Books can provide a bridge to new places as well by introducing them to unexplored areas. One special feature of the program is author week. During the week there are daily activities in every grade which include listening to books written by the chosen author. This year's author was Cynthia Rylant, a native of West Virginia. Literature kits were put together which included bulletin board ideas, information about West Virginia heritage and curriculum ideas for math, science, and social studies. To add to the children's real story experiences one school posted flyers around the building telling about Mudge, a missing dog who is a character in one of Cynthia Rylant's books. One of the adult readers volunteered her 210 pound Mastiff to play the role of Mudge and the students actually found "Mudge" in the building.

Conclusion

Children need to hear stories; they need to see the people they love enjoy reading to them. They need to have the opportunity to read and to be read to. Programs like Read Aloud West Virginia are a wonderful step in that direction.

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My 101 Personal Favorite Read-Alouds
For Young Children

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? Bill Martin Jr.
The Complete Adventures of Peter Rabbit Beatrix Potter
Corduroy Don Freeman
Curious George H.A. Rey
Frog and Toad Are Friends George Lobel
Georgie Robert Bright
Goodnight Moon Margaret Wise Brown
Happy Birthday Moon Frank Asch
If I Ran The Zoo and others by Dr. Seuss
If You Give a Mouse a Cookie Laura Numeroff
The Little Engine That Could Wally Piper
Make Way For Ducklings Robert McCloskey
Millions of Cats Wanda Gag
The Napping House Audrey Wood
Pat the Bunny Dorothy Kunhardt
Peter's Chair Jack Ezra Keats
The Puppy Who Wanted a Boy Jane Thayer
The Real Mother Goose Rand McNally and Company
The Runaway Bunny Margaret Wise Brown
The Silver Pony (A Wordless Book) Lynd Ward
Sheep in a Jeep Nancy Shaw
The Snowy Day Jack Ezra Keats
Tomie de Paola's Mother Goose Tomie de Paola
The Very Hungry Caterpillar Eric Carle
What is It? Tana Hoban

For Kindergarten and Up

Alexander & the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day J. Viorst
Amelia Bedelia Peggy Parrish
*Angel Child, Dragon Child Michele Maria Surat
*Appalachia: The Voices of Sleeping Birds Cynthia Rylant
*Ben's Trumpet Rachel Isadora
Best Friends For Frances Russell Hoban
*The Black Snowman Phil Mendez
Blueberries For Sal Robert McCloskey
*Borreguita and the Coyote: A tale from Mexico Verna Aardema
*The Boy and the Ghost Robert D. San Souci
*Branta and the Golden Stone Walter Wangerin Jr.
*Bringing the Rains to Kapiti Plain Verna Aardema
*Cajun Night Before Christmas Trosclair
Caps For Sale Esphyr Slobdkina
Cloudy With A Chance of Meatballs Judi Barrett
*The Day of Ahmed's Secret F. Parry Heide & J. Heide Gilliland
Doctor De Soto William Steig
*Dragon Kite of the Autumn Moon Valerie Reddix
The Dreamer Cynthia Rylant
The Giving Tree Shel Silverstein
Good Dog, Carl (A Picture Book) Alexandra Day
The Hungry Thing Jan Slepian & Ann Seidler
Ira Says Goodbye Bernard Waber
*Jerusalem Still Shining Kara Kuskin

Johnny Appleseed Steven Kellogg
 The Jolly Postman Or Other People's Letters Janet & Allen Ahlberg
 The King Who Rained and others by Fred Gwynne
 Koko's Kitten Dr. Francine Patterson
 *The Legend of the Bluebonnet Tomie de Paola
 *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush Tomie de Paola
 Let's Be Friends Again Hans Wilhelm
 *Lon Po Po: A Red Riding Hood Story from China Ed Young
 Lovable Lyle Bernard Waber
 Miss Nelson Is Missing Harry Allard
 *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters John Steptoe
 The Polar Express Chris Van Allsburg
 *Prairie Night Before Christmas James Rice
 *The Rag Coat Lauren Mills
 The Stinky Cheese Man & other Fairly Stupid Tales Scieszka & Smith
 Stone Soup Ann McGovern
 *Strega Nona Tomie de Paola
 Tikki Tikki Tembo Arlene Mosel
 The True Story of the Three Little Pigs! John Scieszka
 The Velveteen Rabbit Margery Williams
 *When I Was Young in the Mountains Cynthia Rylant
 Where the Wild Things Are Maurice Sendak
 *Why the Sun and the Moon Live In the Sky Elphinstone Dayrell
For Older Children
 The Black Stallion Walter Farley
 Bridge to Terabithia Katherine Paterson
 The Call of the Wild Jack London
 Charlotte's Web E.B. White
 Cricket In Time Square George Selden
 Freckle Juice and others by Judy Blume
 From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler E.L. Konigsburg
 Island of the Blue Dolphins Scott O'Dell
 Jacob Have I Loved Katherine Paterson
 James and the Giant Peach Roald Dahl
 The Jungle Book Rudyard Kipling
 Harriet The Spy Louise Fitzhugh
 The Hobbit J.R. Tolkien
 Little House on the Prairie Laura Ingles Wilder
 Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIHM Robert O'Brien
 The Mysteries of Harris Burdick Chris Van Allsburg
 *Number the Stars Lois Lowry
 Paul Harvey's The Rest of the Story Paul Auerant
 Ramona the Pest and others by Beverly Cleary
 Roll Of Thunder, Hear My Cry Mildred Taylor
 Sarah, Plain and Tall Patricia MacLachlan
 Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark Collected by Alvin Schwartz
 The Secret Garden Frances Hodgson Burnett
 *Shiloh Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
 The War With Grandpa Robert Smith
 Wayside School is Falling Down Louis Sachar
 Where the Red Fern Grows Wilson Rawls
 The Wonderful Wizard of Oz L. Frank Baum
 A Wrinkle in Time Madeleine L'Engle